

Matthew 6:12, 14-15
Forgiveness

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew 6. As we continue studying the sermon on the Mount together at Oxford we have made it to the heart of the sermon. How fitting that we have found a prayer at the heart of the sermon. This prayer is known as the Lord's prayer but we have learned that this is not the Lord's prayer so much as it is the prayer that the Lord has given us to model our own praying. As we are studying this prayer we are learning not only how to pray, but the privilege of prayer. Let's read the entire prayer together.

READ TEXT

Pray

There are no unforgiving people in heaven. I didn't say there are no unforgiven people in heaven. I said, there are no unforgiving people in heaven. That fact has a little bit of a bite to it, doesn't it? It is explicit in the text that will take our attention this morning. Listen to them again with the thought of no unforgiving people in heaven. READ VERSES 12, 14-15.

Let's make sure we understand the flow of the prayer. The prayer begins with our Father in heaven's name who is holy. This sets our perspective. From that lofty perspective, we are commanded to pray for bread and forgiveness. What does bread have to do with forgiveness? Both of these petitions, grounded in God and his goodness, have to do with something that we need. Bread of course is necessary for life, but so is forgiveness. That is the first point this morning:

1. We Need Forgiveness

Jesus has come to give us life, abundant life. Jesus has come to our condition of death and decay to invite us into the eternal fellowship of himself, the Father, and the Spirit. The core of our fellowship with him is forgiveness. Look at the Bible.

Jesus tells us to ask forgiveness of our debts. Everyone in America understands debt, we are a nation of debtors. Our entire government just shut down because of budgeting. The average American carries over \$137,000 in debt! In our day, this is nothing more than an annoyance. There is bankruptcy and all those things, but there are no longer debtors prison. When Jesus talked about debt he was speaking to a culture that equated debt with tragedy. In the Roman empire, a debtor would be imprisoned until what he owed was paid. Jesus uses this idea of debt with all its weight to talk about a serious offence.

Here the debt that Jesus is referring to is not financial debt but a sin debt. A wrong has been committed and so we need forgiveness. What debt do we owe? The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. What is sin? Sin is a transgression, a trespass against God. God is the sovereign Lord of the Universe. When we disobey him, and do things that he commands us not to do we sin not against his ways but against Him! The wages of that sin is death. Every person stands before him condemned because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But thanks

be to God that those verses that we quote from Romans aren't the whole context of the verse, and thanks be to God that we have such a prayer as "forgive us."

Let me show you. We all know Romans 6:23, *The wages of sin is death*. But, don't stop there, the verse doesn't. *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord*. We all know Romans 3:23, *All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*. But the sentence keeps going, read 3:24, *and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*.

This prayer is a gospel prayer. This prayer lets us know that forgiveness is available upon request. We know why forgiveness is available at our request. The one telling us to ask for forgiveness is the one who is the instrument of God's forgiveness: Our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus took the wages of our sin upon his own back, paid the penalty of our sin all so that we could be forgiven. Knowing this gives us the confidence to say, *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* (Romans 8:32). Of course we are forgiven, look at what great lengths he has gone to forgive us.

2. Jesus is the Satisfaction for Our Sin

We have a God who is more ready to forgive than we are even to ask. God is determined to forgive sin, and so the Son came to satisfy the wrath of God on our behalf. As the Puritan Pastor Richard Sibbes said, "There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us."¹ This is why Charles Gabriel taught us to sing:

I stand amazed in the presence
of Jesus, the Nazarene,
and wonder how he could love me,
a sinner, condemned, unclean.

He took my sins and my sorrows;
he made them his very own;
he bore the burden to Calvary
and suffered and died alone

How marvelous, how wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
How marvelous, how wonderful
is my Savior's love for me!

We never get over this marvelous love displayed for us. If you yawn at the cross then chances are you have never been to the Cross.

This prayer of forgiveness is one that we constantly need. This is why Jesus tells his disciples to pray this way. We are the people who pray for forgiveness. It isn't that we receive salvation more and more when we ask for forgiveness but that we grow into the grace we have received.

¹ Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*, 16.

Since coming to Christ I have confessed more sin than I could have ever imagined before Christ saved me. Before I didn't know any different, now I do and so I ask for forgiveness. There again, because of Jesus I have the confidence, as John says, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.* (1 John 1:9–10)

Our whole life is a response to this forgiveness. We ask for forgiveness and we forgive. This is the test of discipleship – forgiving others. This is why Jesus puts it in strict terms in this prayer.

3. We Forgive as We Have Been Forgiven

Remember what this prayer is, this is the Lord's prayer that he has given us to pray in the dawn of the new creation that the empty tomb has brought. Jesus has demonstrated infinite love in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. As David Crowder reminds us while reflecting on Romans 5:

I'm the one who held the nail
It was cold between my fingertips
I've hidden in the garden
I've denied You with my very lips

God, I fall down to my knees
with a hammer in my hand
You look at me, arms open

Forgiven, Forgiven
You love me even when I don't deserve it
Forgiven, I'm forgiven
Jesus, Your blood makes me innocent
So I will say goodbye to every sin
I am forgiven, I am forgiven

Jesus calls us to follow him. Where is Jesus going? Heaven? Of course, but remember that the path to heaven is by means of a cross. Jesus says take up your cross and follow me.

Look at the text closely. This is not a forgive or else receive no forgiveness passage. Look closely. Don't take verses 14-15 out of the context of the Lord's prayer. Jesus is exacting discipleship and letting us know that if we have an attitude of unforgiveness we haven't received the transforming gospel of grace!

What is the gospel of grace? The gospel is God's forgiveness freely bestowed on us not because of merit but contrary to merit – we didn't deserve forgiveness, mercy, grace, love, but he gave us all of those plus some. This verse can't be saying forgive me because I am so forgiving, on the contrary, it is assuring us that we understand this gospel – not forgive me *because* but forgive me *as* I forgive. This speaks of the difference that the Father makes in the life of his children – he forgave, we forgive. If we don't forgive, we aren't forgiven.

Some of you may say, Pastor you don't know what I have been through. I don't want to make light of your situation. I know there may be a hurt that runs deep, so deep that you can't see anything else. Jesus is calling you today to open your eyes to a world that is coming, a world that he is bringing where even the vilest offender can be forgiven of all sin. If that world is a true world, and if God can forgive us, how can we not forgive? Are we better than God?

Many of us were fixed with all sorts of emotions this last week as we heard of the former US Olympics Gymnast Dr. Larry Nasser who was found guilty of molesting more than 160 women and girls as young as six over a period of decades. The starting point for the avalanche of justice was one brave woman who came forward first with accusations – Mrs. Rachel Denhollander. At Nasser's sentencing Denhollander addressed the court for 40 minutes. What she said to the man who abused her can only be equated to the grace of Jesus Christ.

Nasser brought a Bible with him to his sentencing, a move that some thought was manipulative. Denhollander said directly to the one who gratified himself at the cost of her innocence:

In our early hearings, you brought your Bible into the courtroom and you have spoken of praying for forgiveness. And so, it is on that basis that I appeal to you. If you have read the Bible you carry, you know the definition of sacrificial love portrayed is of God himself loving so sacrificially that he gave up everything to pay a penalty for the sin he did not commit. By his grace, I, too, choose to love this way.

You spoke of praying for forgiveness. But Larry, if you have read the Bible you carry, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things, as if good deeds can erase what you have done. It comes from repentance which requires facing and acknowledging the truth about what you have done in all of its utter depravity and horror without mitigation, without excuse, without acting as if good deeds can erase what you have seen this courtroom today.

The Bible you carry says it is better for a stone to be thrown around your neck and you throw into a lake than for you to make even one child stumble. And you have damaged hundreds.

The Bible you speak carries a final judgment where all of God's wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you. Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you.

I pray you experience the soul crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me—though I extend that to you as well.²

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/incredible-testimony-former-gymnast-confronts-sexual-abuser-court/>

C.S. Lewis was right when he said, “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”

I have never done anything that bad some might say. They’d be right. We have all done worse. We were responsible for the death of the only perfect one who ever lived – Jesus the spotless lamb of God who came to take away our sin. And this one taught us to pray for forgiveness, and he who taught us to pray for forgiveness will forgive.

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer, the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Are you forgiven? Are you forgiving?